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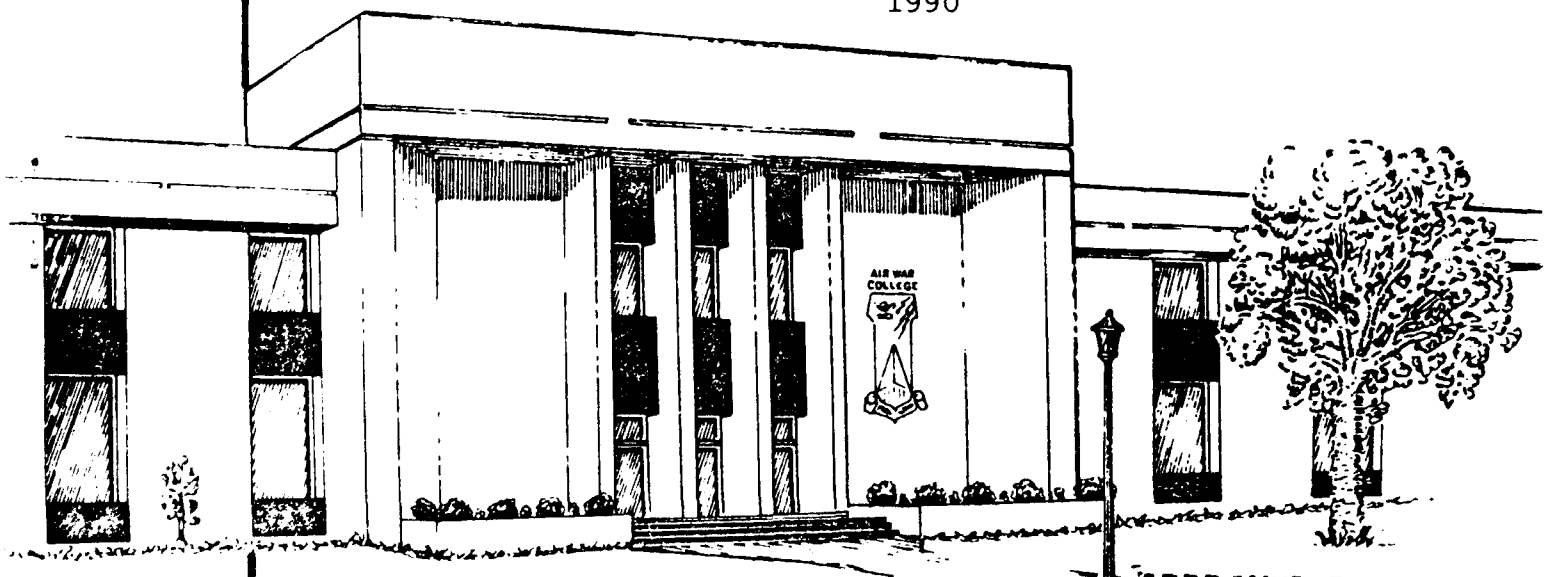
GORBACHEV'S NEW INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK
AND THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

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LIEUTENANT COLONEL SHLOMO N. SAS, IAF

1990



AIR UNIVERSITY
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

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AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

GORBACHEV'S NEW INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK
AND THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

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A DEFENSE ANALYTICAL STUDY SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
IN
FULFILLMENT OF THE CURRICULUM
REQUIREMENT

Advisor: Dr David E. Albright

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE

May 1990



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DISCLAIMER

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gorbachev's new outlook has highlighted new means to spread the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union specifically. His new means, especially his emphasis on diplomacy, can be compared to those of Metternich and Bismark in the 19th century; moreover, his approach has induced Western statesmen to alter frozen ways of thinking and attitudes; he uses global Real-Politik.

The Middle East, a region of vast importance, has reacted favorably to the new Soviet policy. This work investigates Soviet relations with Egypt, Israel, Syria and Jordan during the pre-Gorbachev era and after his inauguration.

The new trends in the region have enabled Gorbachev to:

- 1) recover from the setback with Egypt;
- 2) create open bilateral relations with the state of Israel which have resulted in enhanced diplomatic relations and waves of emigration of Soviet Jews;
- 3) bring radical, isolated Syria to the notion of a possible peaceful settlement with Israel and force Assad to accept the notion that he should favor solution to the Palestinian problem under leadership of Yasser Arafat.

The global strategic advantages that Gorbachev has gained with respect to the United States have included:

- 1) improving bilateral relations, which is beneficial to the USSR in the diplomatic sphere (basically, in the Lithuanian affair, the United States is reticent about denouncing the Soviet acts in spite of the United States official policy);
- 2) and U.S. consent to Soviet participation in an international conference in the Middle East which in global terms legitimizes Soviet stances worldwide in various contingencies.

Whereas Gorbachev's policy can be viewed as opportunist, it is beyond doubt in my estimation that he employed pragmatic means in the Middle East in order to maintain and extend Soviet influence in the region. Vying for hegemony in the Middle East, which approaches the 21 century, continues by other means. To date, it seems, Gorbachev has found the Golden Mean.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lieutenant Colonel Shlomo Sas is an international officer from the Israeli Air Force. He is a fighter pilot, experienced on the A-4 Skyhawk, F-4 Phantom, and F-16A/C. He has held previous assignments as a squadron commander, accumulating 3,000 flight hours and operational experience. During this time, he also downed a Syrian MiG-23.

His military education includes Squadron Officer School and Squadron Commander School, both in Israel, and the Air War College in the United States. Lt Col Sas holds a bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts from Auburn University in Montgomery, Alabama.

His interest in the subject of this study reflects his views on the importance of the changes arising in the Middle East since Gorbachev's inauguration and the scope of their influence on Israel.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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The Middle East is a region of vast significance; it has been since the most ancient eras and remains so today. The area has long had strategic and economic merit, as well as being the cradle of the world's monotheistic religions.

Various superpowers, ancient and modern, have vied for hegemony in the region and the means they have used to do so have varied in their extremes from savage brute force to Byzantine-cunning diplomacy. The nationalism that has arisen in the current century, and especially since World War II, has brought an end to reliance on raw, brute force to enforce national will in the region. Instead, emphasis has turned to other ways: ideology, diplomacy, military and economic aid, although raw power remains an ever-present iron fist in a velvet glove.

Two main superpowers have exerted influence in the region in the post-World War II era--the United States (US) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Each has attempted to maximize its respective benefits from the region, most frequently at the expense of the other. Their rivalry in the region grew out of global strife between them and it is considered coterminous with the US-Soviet "Cold War."

At present, however, a new era of opportunity seems to be opening up as a consequence of Mikhail Gorbachev's global strategy to solve the USSR's economic difficulties. This stresses peaceful means and mutual military concessions to mitigate world tension. Such an approach affects the relation between the USSR and the countries in the area, thus setting the stage for the application of new kinds of tactics in order to spread the USSR's sphere of influence.

Gorbachev's new global outlook gains him much credit on the world scene. It is a time in which no goal seems too difficult for the Soviets to achieve.

This study's ultimate goal is to analyze and assess current trends and possible future developments in Soviet policy under Gorbachev's leadership with respect to Egypt, Israel, Syria and Jordan. In order to fully comprehend and to understand the prospects of future developments of Soviet policy, this work will scrutinize past relations between the Soviet Union and the relevant countries, stating essential cornerstones and elaborating on developments since 1970.

The study begins with an examination of the sources of Soviet involvement in the Middle East. Then it proceeds with discussions of 1) the implementation of Soviet policy before Gorbachev's era and 2) the implementation of Soviet policy after Gorbachev was inaugurated. Both deal with Soviet tools and tactics and with Soviet relations with Egypt, Israel, Syria, and Jordan, and they highlight the changes in tools and tactics that Gorbachev has implemented,

thereby improving the Soviet stance in the Middle East. The last part, conclusions, looks at the implications of changes for the future.

An issue of vast importance to the region is the Palestinian problem. Because of the major changes that have already occurred with respect to this problem as well as its complexity, it is not addressed separately, but its influence is dealt with in the treatments of each country separately.

A salient development that will be described in the study, and should be kept in mind while reading it, is the USSR's growing pragmatism, something which has culminated in Gorbachev's era. This has introduced flexibility and opportunism as means to the persisting Soviet end of world hegemony.

CHAPTER II

SOURCES OF SOVIET INVOLVEMENT

Soviet policy in the Middle East over the years has been motivated by a number of considerations, including strategic importance, economic advantages, spread of the Marxist-Leninist ideology and prestige.¹ Furthermore, the Middle East has been used as a region for challenging the United States, just as other regions of the world have been. Albeit Soviet motives are essentially those of any superpower, however, Soviet commentary is infused with the conviction that the Soviet Union is a Middle Eastern power by right of history and geography, with an unchallengeable claim to a voice in local affairs.²

The strategic importance of the Middle East to the USSR arises from the proximity of the area to Soviet borders and to its function as a land bridge linking the European, African and Asian continents. In addition, the region contains the bulk of the Western world's petroleum reserves and the vital sea lanes through which these reserves are transported.³

The strategic value of the region has served as the impetus for an aggressive Soviet penetration policy based on ideological, military and economic tactics. These tactics gave the Soviets naval basing rights, military privileges, such as overflight, and political relations to sustain them.

All of these promoted its expansion, thus negating American presence in the area. By gaining such forward positions, the Soviets were also able to secure Mother Russia from a potential Western attack.

The economic tool brought advantages because of the surpluses of the Soviet goods and military equipment that suited Third World countries' needs. Economic aid was beneficial to both sides. The Soviets gained hard currency from those countries which were dependent on her penetration, and at the same time they tied the Third World's economy to that of the USSR.

Whereas it seemed earlier that the Soviet's gained greater advantages in comparison to the Arab countries because of the USSR's superiority and the creation of sets of patron-client relations, in which the clients were economically inferior, it is evident now that only the most radical and the weakest Arab country in the region, Syria, paid the price of its not being able to conduct an independent policy. Egypt, for example, conducted an independent policy and did not even hesitate to abrogate a friendship treaty with the USSR over economic disagreements like the rescheduling of her debt.

In addition, the economic advantages that the USSR obtained turned to economic burdens from the mid-1970s on because of the internal economic difficulties. This will be discussed later.

It is important to understand that as of today, the Soviets value very highly economic connections. As Peter G. Alkhimov, the head of the Middle East Department, of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations, has written, such ties are important international phenomena, characterized by mutual benefits.⁴

The final Soviet justification for Middle East involvement has been a desire to spread Marxist-Leninist ideology. The ideology is an umbrella which gives the Soviet rulers legitimacy. By spreading their ideology and increasing their arena of influence, they prove to themselves the superiority of the Soviet way of life, hence justifying the Soviet regime's existence. In addition, the spread of the ideology gives them prestige, and expands the USSR's borders with radical countries, and undermines the United States all over the world.

The trail of Soviet involvement in the Third World is by no means a straight line. As Dr. Robert O. Freedman argues, the " Soviet goal is an offensive one--to dominate the Middle East in order to deny its oil, strategic communication routes, and other assets to the United States and their allies."⁵ In order to achieve their ends, the Soviets have applied tactics which embody ideological, military, economic and diplomatic methods. The degree of usage of a specific method has changed throughout the years and in regard to a specific country.

Whereas the reasons for involvement are fairly obvious, the diversity and the complexity of the region put a high hurdle in front of Soviet policymakers. Among the complexities are: 1) Arabic internal conflicts raise difficulties for a unified Arab front against the West; 2) opinions with regard to the Palestinian problem differ; 3) the PLO has many factions which engage in rivalries with each other; 4) atheistic communism clashes with the Islamic nature of the Arab countries.⁶ Consequently, it is clear that the Soviet leadership must find the most flexible and opportunistic policy to achieve Soviet goals in the region.

The next part will discuss the Soviet tools and tactics in general as a basis for looking at the changes in Soviet means that have taken place in Gorbachev's era.

NOTES

CHAPTER II

¹ Augustus Richard Norton, "The Soviet Union and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," in The Limits of Soviet Power in the Developing World, ed. by Edward Kolodziej and Roger E. Kanet (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 275.

² "The Sources of Soviet Involvement in the Middle East: Threat or Opportunity," The Soviet Union and the Middle East: Constraints and Dilemmas, ed. by Mark V. Kaupi and R. Craig Nation, (Toronto: Lexington Books, 1983), p. 43.

³ Ibid., p. 47 and Robert O. Freedman, Soviet Policy Toward the Middle East Since 1970 3rd ed. (New York: Praeger, 1982), p. 1.

⁴ "The Sources of Soviet Involvement in the Middle East: Threat or Opportunity," p. 52.

⁵ Freedman, Soviet Policy Toward the Middle East Since 1970, p. 1.

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CHAPTER III

SOVIET TOOLS AND TACTICS

Soviet tactics to achieve influence all over the world consist of all the elements that a superpower can offer to its allies. Tactics differ from time to time because of internal constraints like the economy, and national internal unrest of ethnic minorities, and because of external limitations caused by mutual vying for influence with the United States, and by the independent behavior of the countries of the region (which, for example, led to treaty repudiations by Egypt in 1976 and Somalia in 1977).¹

Analysis here of the four tools of Soviet policy-- ideology, diplomatic policy, military aid, and economic aid--is done in the traditional manner of assessing the means of superpower influence. In the author's opinion, those means can be reduced into two obvious parts:

1. the intangible--ideology and diplomacy;
2. the tangible--military and economic aid.

The first cannot exist alone; therefore, they are not concrete means of influence. The second group can exist on their own and exert influence regardless of the first one.

The Ideological Tool

The first instrument to be examined is the ideological one. Although Marxist-Leninist ideology has been used pragmatically as a penetrating tool, it is important to remember that it also serves as the basis for Soviet legitimacy in countering the United States. This legitimizing function has two dimensions, one domestic and the other international. Internally, Marxism-Leninism justifies the existence of the Soviet regime. It seemed to any Soviet leader prior to Gorbachev that attempting to deviate from a Marxist-Leninist line would destroy the ground from which he operated.² Externally, Marxist-Leninist ideology supports Soviet pretensions in Eastern Europe and in the developing countries.

Although Marxist-Leninist ideology is generally considered as an unaltering reality, we can find cases of pragmatism and bending in its employment to produce achievements. The Soviets, for example, downplayed ideology in order to gain points with the more moderate Arab countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, etc. This more "liberal" ideological emphasis was implemented by the "right-wing" school in comparison to the left-wing Marxist-Leninist school, sometimes at the cost of a significant dilution of local Communist strength.³

Therefore, it is sometimes argued that the Soviet leaders are cynical with regard to ideology. In particular, they in practice reject a universal classless society,

thereby retreating from utopian revolutionary idealism.

But it would be a fallacy to hold that ideology is nothing but ex post facto rationalism with respect to the international arena.⁴ The ideological tool found reflection in Soviet encouragement of the creation of Communist parties in the Third World countries, which contributed to the revolutionary hue that the Arab countries had in the early days. Prior to the 1980s, the U.S.S.R. even considered party-to-party relations of a higher order than routine state-to-state formal diplomatic ties.⁵ The Communist parties were also widely used to kindle anti-imperialist opposition to Israel and the United States. Nevertheless, the contradiction between the atheistic nature of communism and the non-atheistic Arab nature, in conjunction with Soviet interference in local Arab affairs, sometimes caused sharp deterioration in relations between Moscow and the Arab countries in which Communist parties operated.⁶

Until Gorbachev, then, Soviet ideology was indubitably viewed as a major tool, especially in revolutionary countries such as Cuba, Angola, Syria, etc. The ideological tool, however, was bound to undergo change and modification to achieve Soviet ends throughout the whole world. The main shift in emphasis in this regard in the 1980s was caused by Gorbachev and will be discussed subsequently.

Diplomatic Policy

The second tool used by the USSR is diplomatic policy. Soviet diplomatic policy should be considered a more realistic instrument than the ideological one.

In the Middle East, Soviet diplomatic policy before Gorbachev policy was tailored to achieve influence and fixed upon the Arabs as the main leverage. By advocating Arab unity against Israel and the West, the Soviets wished to reduce U.S. influence in the region. Furthermore, their policy was aimed at acquiring military air and naval bases, footholds which would enable the USSR to expand its influence.

Leonid Brezhnev's policy has been characterized as a "left wing" policy which emphasized support of Marxist-Leninist regimes such as Angola, Afghanistan, Ethiopia even though sometimes these regimes were relatively weak; nevertheless, his policy embraced heterogeneous collections of states around the globe. This feature demonstrated the tactical nature of the Soviet policy.⁷

Brezhnev's flexible policy sought to improve relations with moderate Arab states after achieving the single foothold in Syria⁸, but it suffered from ups and downs. The theme of anti-imperialism was the dominant one after the American-sponsored Camp David accord between Egypt and Israel. The Arabs, who felt that the U.S. could not influence Israel in order to achieve a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian problem, criticized the U.S. and

came to rely more heavily on the Soviet Union. A good illustration was anti-communist Saudi Arabia.⁹

Achievements of Soviet policy in the Middle East found expression in long-term friendship and cooperation treaties. Such treaties were concluded with Egypt (1971) and Syria (1980).¹⁰

Soviet policy also encountered some setbacks, however. First, the Soviets could not create a united front within the Arab countries of the region to oppose the United States in the regional affairs.¹¹ Second, the growing economic problems of the USSR impaired its ability to reinforce the diplomatic effort with economic aid to achieve Soviet ends, thus causing Third World countries not to be hasty in decreasing ties with the West.¹² Third, the Soviets were not able to talk to all the parties who played a role in the Middle East conflict. Most important, they did not have diplomatic relations with Israel. The only superpower who had this capability was the United States. As a consequence, the Soviets were excluded from the peace negotiations after Anwar Sadat's 1977 initiative.¹³ Fourth, the surpluses of money accumulated by the rich Arab countries enabled them to look for Western and Japanese technology, thus weakening both economic bonds and diplomatic ties with the USSR.¹⁴ Finally, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, a Muslim country, was perceived by the Arabs as a war against an Islamic entity.

Generally speaking, the Soviets are the main loser in efforts to expand influence in the area, although both the USSR and the United States found themselves confronting impediments to enhancing their influence in the countries in the region.¹⁵ These setbacks were not invisible to Gorbachev's eyes. He knew that he had to take proper steps in order to regain dominance in the region.

Military Aid

The military instrument was preferred above all others by the Soviets before Gorbachev. In light of economic constraints on the USSR, the need of arms by Third World countries involved in regional conflicts, the USSR's surplus of arms, and the value of arms sales to the Soviet economy, the Soviet Union became a major provider of arms. In addition to arms supply, the Soviets sent military advisors all over the Third World, thus achieving direct supervision and the ability to intervene in local affairs.¹⁶

The USSR was the chief beneficiary of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Arab need for the Soviet arms enabled the USSR to develop patron-client relations. Although the quality of its arms lagged behind that of Western equipment, the Soviet arms were cheap and could be supplied in large quantities and in a short time.¹⁷

Military relations with the Arab countries started in September 1958 with a \$200 million Czech arms transfer to Egypt, orchestrated by Moscow. Subsequent arms deals were arranged with Syria (1956). Soviet arms deliveries to various Middle East and North African countries averaged about \$500 million annually from 1956 to 1974. This figure rose to more than \$3 billion annually in 1975 to 1979, and to \$5 billion to \$6 billion annually in 1979 to 1985.¹⁸

In retrospect, the 1970s ushered in a decade of particularly dramatic Soviet activity. Along with the arms supply, the Soviets took an active role in the Arab-Israeli

confrontation. They sent to Egypt anti-aircraft missile batteries which shot down Israeli planes, and Soviet pilots flew intercept missions from Egypt during the Attrition War.¹⁹ That state of affairs led to inevitable aerial clashes between Soviet and Israeli pilots, most notably on 31 July 1970, when Israelis downed four Soviet-flown MiG-21s.²⁰

In exchange, the Soviets gained strategic, economic, and political advantages. The strategic advantage was access to military facilities in Egypt and Syria. The economic gain was acquisition of hard currency. Nearly 85 percent of arms deliveries to the region in 1981 were for hard currency, and for the 1970-81 period such sales contributed about 20 percent to the Soviet Union's total hard currency exports.²¹ The culmination of arms sales in the political sense was "friendship" treaties with Egypt in 1971 and Syria in 1980.²²

But the military aid was a two-edged sword. It created the dilemma of choosing between risky intervention on behalf of an Arab client in military difficulties or abstention at the cost of losing influence, prestige, and credibility. The Soviets did not intervene in the 1956 or 1967 wars. As mentioned before, the Soviets intervened in the Attrition War, but they stayed aside again in the 1973 war and in the 1982 war in Lebanon. Their responses were diplomatic, followed by mass propaganda and by quick arms assistance during the wars and thereafter. For example,

after the 1982 war, they provided Syria with \$1.5 to \$2 billion in arms.²³

In two cases, the USSR succeeded in "saving face" with its Arab allies. It 1) broke relations with Israel after the 1967 war, and 2) threatened military intervention in the 1973 war to prevent the destruction of the Egyptian Third Army, although it ultimately backed down because of U.S. reaction.²⁴

Another cause of problems with military aid stemmed from intervention of Soviet advisors and military personnel in Egypt. The Soviets acted independently in Egypt, tried to conduct a coup against Anwar Sadat, and did not supply quality arms to the Egyptians before or after the 1973 war. This behavior led to the abrogation of the Soviet-Egyptian friendship treaty in 1976.

To conclude, military aid was traditionally viewed by the Soviets as a major tool to achieve strategic gains against the U.S. The surpluses of weapons that the USSR had and the contribution to the Soviet economy that sales of them produced made the military tool the most important one for the Soviets in dealing with the countries in the Middle East.

Economic Aid

Economic aid served as one of the most important means by which the Soviets penetrated Third World countries prior to Gorbachev. The Soviets viewed economic ties as mutually beneficial and part of a package which covered the spheres of politics, trade, scientific and cultural relations.²⁵ Their policy in the Third World did not differ much from a salesman. They aimed not only to oppose Western influence in the region but also to gain economic and strategic advantages (air and naval bases).

Until the 1970s, Soviet aid suited many Third World countries. Soviet industry was able to assist the latter with the right type of machinery and technology.²⁶ The Soviet Union exported to Arab countries power-generating metallurgical, mining, transport and other equipment, including complete packages for the construction of industrial, agricultural and other projects.²⁷

The strong Soviet ties with Syria, the most radical country in the region, included the Euphrates and Al-Baas Dams, phosphates, agriculture, etc. Total Soviet aid to Syria from 1977 to 1980, including military aid is estimated at \$15 billion.²⁸

Egypt, second most important country in the region, began economic relations with the 1955 Aswan Dam project, Helwan integrated iron and steel works, and Nag-Hamadi aluminum industries. The extent of trade relations varied through the years. In 1970, they amounted to 606.4 million

rubles and reached a climax of 710 million rubles in 1975. In 1988, they stood at 500 million rubles.²⁹

Until the mid 1970s, the USSR used surpluses of its planned socialist economy as a complementary means to the ideological and military tactics ones in its confrontations with the West. But, during the late 1970s, the Soviets realized that the USSR economic performance was failing to meet their political aspirations. They exposed their own technological lag and embarked on an ambitious program of modernization with Western assistance. As a result of this development and changes in Third World economies--some Arab countries became rich from oil production and shifted to a reliance on Western technology--the Soviets began to lose influence.³⁰

Although facing economic difficulties, the Soviets continued to aid their major ally, Syria, thus preventing the latter's economic collapse. With respect to Egypt, the Soviets faced an adamant partner who wanted to take advantage of the Soviets' use of aerial and naval bases. This issue was a cause for debate that contributed to the rift between the Soviets and Sadat.

The full extent of Soviet economic difficulties was concealed until Gorbachev assumed power. He then revealed the severity of the problems in order to restructure the Soviet economy.

To conclude, the decline of the economic tool as a means to achieve political ends is not a phenomenon of the mid-1980s to date. The troubles with the Soviet economy that weakened Soviet influence started more than a decade ago.

NOTES

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CHAPTER IV

SOVIET RELATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST PRIOR TO GORBACHEV

This chapter will analyze and assess Soviet relations with Egypt, Israel, Syria, and Jordan. The analysis will discuss the establishment of relations with each separate country and trace the evolution of relations until Gorbachev assumed power in 1985. Concentration in the era preceding Gorbachev is important for an understanding of the change that Gorbachev's new outlook has brought.

Soviet-Egyptian Relations

Egypt is the largest Arab country that has played a role in leading the Arabs as a coherent group to achieve nationalistic goals and oppose imperialism. Furthermore, its geographic location in the Middle East, availability of warm water ports there, and inherently unstable relations between Egypt and Israel made the former a perfect "target" of the Soviet's endeavor to spread its influence throughout the region.

The Soviets could apply all their tactics in order to achieve successful penetration in the region: ideology, political diplomacy through creating a counterbalance to the US in the region, military aid against Israel, and economic ties which started in 1955 with the building of the Aswan Dam on the Nile.

The degree of the Soviet influence in Egypt varied throughout the decades after WW II. Hence, it must be emphasized clearly that mutual relations were based on the pragmatic ends of both parties. It often seemed that the Egyptians were the ones who were determining the depth, the pace and the timing of the relations with the Soviets, thus seemingly using the larger country for their own goals. The Soviets recognized Egypt's geographic importance¹, and they knew that in order to fulfill their commitments in the area they needed a solid base for deployment of their military capabilities by connections with Egypt.²

The Soviet foothold in Egypt began in the 1950s. The first solid ties were demonstrated by the Five-Year Treaty of Friendship signed on 31 October 1955.³ These intensified with military and economic penetration designed to gain air and naval bases.⁴

After Egypt's defeat in the 1967 War with Israel, "Egypt's desperation and weakness . . . was conducive to total dependence on the Soviet Union, and its leaders lost little time in exploiting the situation."⁵ This dependence led to a final agreement between the two countries which was signed by Nasser in March 1968.⁶ The agreement enabled the Soviets to do whatever they liked in Egypt's ports and the Cairo West air base,⁷ thus igniting the spark of antagonism between the Russians and the Egyptians.

Until the 1970s--i.e., during President Gamal Abdel Nasser's rule--Soviet penetration intensified from year to year even more profoundly than in radical Syria. Soviet policy sought to maintain favorable regimes by all possible means--diplomacy, military and economic aid--and "the underlying aim was to keep Egypt amenable to its influence."⁸

The Sadat presidency, beginning in 1970, changed the situation. Steadily growing Egyptian resentment at the Soviets' inconsiderate behavior, Soviet reluctance to supply modern weapons to allow Sadat to fight Israel, and Sadat's inability to conduct an independent policy led to a gradual rift between Egypt and the Soviet Union. Sadat's move toward a decision year vis-a-vis Israel caused the expulsion of the Soviets from Egypt on July 17, 1972.⁹

This was a major setback to Soviet policy in the region and maybe the worst in the world. Egypt, a country with scarce resources and dependent on Soviet support, decided to carry out a sharp divorce regardless of Soviet will. The USSR's inability to negate this move teaches us that an independent policy conducted by a country who can play both ends is valid.

After this event, Soviet policy toward Egypt altered from an offensive to a defensive one. The USSR no longer decided the course of actions but had to comply with (or object to) Egyptian moves.

Sadat's decision to fight Israel in the 1973 War brought the last accord between the two countries. The Soviets agreed to Sadat's plan, thereby, taking a big risk.¹⁰ They even threatened to intervene against Israel during the war if the US did not restrain Israel.¹¹

In aftermath of the '73 War, Sadat moved toward the West. Sadat and Israel, under the US umbrella, signed disengagement agreements without Soviet participation.

This led to a Soviet-coordinated diplomatic endeavor. The Soviets embraced the Palestinian cause, denounced the Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement, and gave the Syrians the role of leading the anti-imperialist front.¹² Thus, they sought to isolate Egypt for cooperating with the evil West.

The deterioration in relations was demonstrated by a tangible deed. Sadat, in a speech before the Egyptian Parliament, unilaterally abrogated the Soviet-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.¹³

But the watershed event was Sadat's decision to go to Jerusalem, a move which presented both danger and opportunity to Soviet leadership. Danger, because any success in the peace negotiation between Egypt and Israel could persuade Arab countries like Jordan and Syria, as well as moderate Palestinian elements within and outside the PLO to follow suit and hence isolate the Soviets.¹⁴ Opportunity, because a failure of Egyptian-Israeli talks would isolate Egypt and enable the Soviets to create an anti-imperialist

front. Consequently, Soviet policy, which remained reactive, ". . . could be seen as an attempt to isolate and discredit Sadat in order to, if at all possible, prevent an Egyptian-Israeli agreement from taking place. Or, if an agreement should be consummated despite any Soviet efforts . . . the Soviet strategy was to try to prevent any other Arab state or group from adhering to it."¹⁵

As an outcome of the above, the Soviets were excluded from any negotiation to end the Arab-Israeli dispute, which took place under the auspices of the United States. The Soviets' call for an international conference between the Soviet Union and the Egyptians marked the beginning of the decline of Soviet influence.

Sadat was assassinated on 6 October 1981. His death ended an era of immense importance to Egypt. Sadat's policy showed that the Egyptians could achieve their goals even if they were not supported strongly by the Soviets. Sadat's independent policy set the stage for Hosni Mubarak to create a new relationship with the Soviets on an equal basis. Mubarak was aware of the importance of the Soviets in the region because of the absence of American pressure on Israel for a comprehensive settlement.¹⁶ Mubarak restored Soviet-Egyptian relations on 27 July 1984 in accord with a previous declaration in January 1983 that: "We have no interest in neglecting the Soviet Union."¹⁷ Mubarak thus continued the efforts of former leaders to play between the two superpowers in order to achieve a dominant posture for

Egypt in the region in comparison to other Arab countries and to Israel.

To conclude the analysis concerning Soviet-Egyptian relations, it is obvious that both countries carried out pragmatic policies of self-interest. Egypt, despite suffering setbacks, both military and economic, found the way to express herself in spite of a temporary decline in status. The Soviets, for their part, tried to apply their traditional penetrating tactics of ideology and military and economic aid, but found themselves unable to help Egypt in the way the latter asked for because of Israel's military superiority over Egypt and the US superiority over the USSR. Thus, the Soviets suffered a decline in their relations with Egypt, thereby marginalizing their influence in the international politics in the region.

Soviet-Israeli Relations

Soviet-Israeli relations commenced virtually from the moment the State of Israel was announced in the United Nations in 1948. The Soviet Union extended de jure recognition to Israel and facilitated the provision of critically needed arms through Czechoslovakia during Israel's Independence War.¹⁸ Stalin saw Israel as a state that could become a "people's democracy," and he used both the diplomatic tool and, later, tangible military aid to encourage such a development.

Soon after Israeli independence, relations with the Soviets deteriorated because of Israel's rejection of the Marxist-Leninist route and her relations with the United States. Therefore, the Soviet Union had to decide its direction in the Middle East by weighing the importance of Israel against that of the immense Arab world with its vast natural resources.

To the Soviets, it seemed that the USSR could gain advantages in the Arab world whereas they had no tangible stake in Israel. Consequently, the Soviet policy pattern was determined--inclination toward the Arab world and use of Israel as a lever to forge an Arab anti-imperialist front against the United States.

A watershed event was the Six Day War in June 1967. As the result of this, Soviet clients Egypt and Syria suffered major defeats, which in their turn caused a setback to the Soviets vis-a-vis the United States. The Soviets used

this event to break diplomatic relations with Israel.

Still another outcome of the war was the increasing importance of the Palestinians. The Soviets thus openly affirmed their "solidarity with the Palestinian Arabs and support for their legitimate rights in the struggle against Zionism."¹⁹

After the war, the Soviets carried out coordinated measures to exclude Israel from the United Nations, as well as unleashing vast propaganda comparing Israel to the Nazi regime, and purging Jews in the Soviet Union.²⁰ The harsh line of opposition to Israel--total derecognition--led to an active military clash against Israel during the Attrition War against Egypt in 1970. But, the 1970s also convinced the Soviets that ignoring Israel prevented them from serving as a mediator in the dispute between the Arabs and the Israelis, as compared with the United States.

Rifts in the united Arab anti-imperialist front started to become apparent when Sadat came to power in Egypt. Egypt under his rule pursued an independent policy which left the Soviet Union outside the mainstream of negotiations.

The Soviets suffered still another major setback when they were excluded from Egypt in 1972 and then barred from mediation of the Arab-Israeli dispute after the 1973 War. These developments, which demonstrated Israel's military superiority, induced the Soviets to emphasize diplomatic means. They advocated an international conference as

the best formula to solve the Arab-Israeli dispute and the Palestinian problem. In this fashion, the USSR aligned itself with the majority, and the more radical elements of the Arab world.²¹ A Soviet diplomatic overture was the peace proposal that it offered on October 1, 1977. This, however, did not find an echo in either Israel or in the Arab world.

The only tangible means that the Soviets applied in order to influence Israel concerned the Jewish population in the Soviet Union. The Soviets changed their attitude and downplayed anti-semitism. Nevertheless, Soviet leaders continued to advocate purges and anti-semitism, a fact that complicated relations between the two and the relations between the USSR and the US.

In sum, Soviet policy until Gorbachev came to power was based on:

- 1) a principle of achieving gains in the Arab world that also negated United States influence in the region,
- 2) supporting radical movements like the Palestinians and Syria,
- 3) regarding Israel as an imperialist tool and using her for leverage to achieve Soviet ends vis-a-vis the Arabs and the US, and
- 4) a declared stance in favor of an international conference.

It was evident that the Soviet policy toward Israel did not gain the credibility and legitimacy that the former sought to achieve. The consequence was the USSR's exclusion. It found itself pushed into a corner and isolated, with its freedom of maneuver limited. Thus, it was apparent

that a conservative policy which supported only one party in the Middle East conflict was doomed to failure.

Soviet-Syrian Relations

Syria is located in a geographical area of importance to the Soviets due to its proximity to the USSR and the presence there of warm water ports. In addition, Syria also suits the Soviets' geopolitical thinking and their Marxist-Leninist ideology. Syria is the most radical of the Arab countries, which enabled the Soviets their strongest foothold in the Middle East.

Syria's instability prior to the 1970s was an open invitation to intervention in her affairs. But Syria, was driven in that era to Soviet arms mainly by defensive considerations. It was surrounded by hostile neighbors such as Turkey, Iraq and Israel. ²²

After Hafez El Assad's advent to power in November 1970, Soviet relations with Syria deepened. Assad proved to be a strong leader who has become the pillar of the Soviet policy in the region. Nevertheless, Soviet-Syrian relations suffered ups and downs during the years because of differing views on the political issues in the area, particularly the on-going Arab-Israeli dispute and the leadership of the PLO.

Assessing features of Soviet diplomacy in the region in light of Assad as the constant variable and the successive Soviet leaders, as the changeable factor in the

equation, affords rich insights into the Soviet way of and Soviet policy. The 1970s in the Middle East were characterized by Egyptian rapprochement with the West, leaving Syria as the key state for Soviet policy in the area.²³ During the Brezhnev era, Syria received all the support it needed, for it was viewed as the leader of the anti-imperialist Arab front. Unlimited support was also given because of the widely-held notion that Soviet military superiority over the West constituted the key to political advances.²⁴

Although Syria's strong posture and her leadership against the West met with favor in Soviet eyes, the USSR still found itself isolated because of its alignment with only one party in the region, the radical front. By the end of the 1970s, moreover, Syria was itself relatively isolated because of its support of Iran against Iraq, the cooling of Syrian-Jordanian relations, and the evolution of Egyptian-Israeli cooperation which put Syria in an inferior situation vis-a-vis Israel.

As a consequence of its isolation, Syria signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the USSR in 1980. The Soviets pointed to this treaty as evidence of its commitment to the Arab world and to strengthen the USSR's position in the area, but the fact that Syria was pretty much isolated at that time undermined Soviet achievement.²⁵ The Soviets, for instance, were excluded from any negotiation relating to the Arab-Israeli dispute.

The decade beginning in 1980 established a new line in Soviet policy which diminished Syrian importance. This process proceeded gradually, but reflected vividly a shift in Soviet approach that culminated in Gorbachev's Real Politik.

Events show that the new trend in Soviet policy related to all countries in the region, including Israel, and involved the use of appropriate new diplomatic and military tools. For example, during the tension between Syria and Jordan in 1980 "...allegedly in response to Jordan's continued aid to the Muslim Brotherhood,"²⁶ the Soviets made clear to Assad that a peaceful solution was a desired consequence.²⁷ This was followed by King Hussein's visit to Moscow followed, in which he signed a military aid contract.

Another example was the failure of the Soviets to deplore Israel's announcement of annexation of the Golan Heights.²⁸ The Soviets did take advantage of this development, however, to strengthen their bargaining position vis-a-vis Syria, while Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet Foreign Minister, conferred with his Israeli counterpart in an attempt to convince Israel to support an international conference.²⁹

The last example was the war in Lebanon in 1982. During this conflict, the Soviets kept a low profile even though they had a treaty with Syria. Their aid was conservative, with both military and political aid to Damascus

amounting essentially to what it had been in previous Arab-Israeli wars.³⁰

After the war, however, the improvement of relations started again. The Soviets restored ". . . the 'lost honour' of Syria's air defense system by deploying Soviet-manned SA-5 surface-to-air missiles. . ." ³¹ Furthermore, they agreed to supply Syria with military equipment to enable the latter to achieve strategic parity with Israel. This policy change was due to Brezhnev's successor, Yuri Andropov.

During the years 1982-1984, and especially after Konstantin Chernenko became the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, the Soviets and Syrians were divided upon several issues. These included (1) rejection of Arafat's leadership of the PLO by the Syrians in contrast to Soviet support of him; (2) Syrian backing of Iran, while the Soviets were interested in Iraq; (3) and the heating up of relations between Israel and Syria because of Syrian terrorist actions, which caused deep Soviet concern because of the possibility of their escalation into a direct confrontation with the United States.

Chernenko took a more even-handed approach to the Middle East than Andropov, seeking to gain political payoffs from relations with all the parties involved there. In a way, we can say that his policy was a prelude to Gorbachev's policy. Chernenko emphasized his diplomacy on a wide spectrum of relations: "Chernenko embarked upon a campaign

to widen Moscow's Middle Eastern horizons beyond the pro-Soviet 'radical' camp."³² In his time, the USSR resumed full diplomatic relations with Egypt in 1984, Andrei Gromyko conferred with Yasser Arafat in Berlin on 7 October 1984. Soviet and Israeli foreign ministers met in September 1984 at the UN General Assembly, and Iraqi foreign minister visited Moscow in October 1984.³³

It seemed that Chernenko was operating along the whole width of the front, pressing the Syrians on all issues of disagreement. Hence, for the first time, he showed Syria what could be done to a dependent, isolated country when global strategy had priority.

Assad, who did not approve of this policy also began to doubt the USSR's readiness to maintain military support to Syria. He tried to play the French card militarily by diversifying Syria's weapon sources.

Assad got unexpected aid from a joint Jordanian-Palestinian endeavor to solve the Palestinian problem. Both declared their willingness to resolve the issue by shifting toward a plan put forth by US President Reagan. This move toward the United States emphasized the irreplaceable role of Syria to the Soviets.

These two developments caused the Soviets to back up Syria again. Assad's diplomacy thus succeeded in influencing the Soviets.

To sum up those relations, they were a truthful reflection of Soviet global interests, as stated before. The means to achieve Soviet goals varied during the years from rigidity toward other countries than Syria in the region and to flexible relations with all other countries in the region.

"Assad has been the Middle Eastern ally for the Soviet Union since the mid-1970's, promoting the fundamental goal of eradicating Western influence in this crucial region on the southern borders of the USSR and offering the USSR an important, if limited, military foothold."³⁴ Thanks to Syria, the USSR was not pushed aside from the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Assad benefited in an economic and military way but suffered some setbacks in the political arena. In the political realm, the Soviets were not satisfied by merely achieving a foothold but wanted more influence: ". . . its (Soviet) presence has never been an end of itself . . ."³⁶

Soviet-Jordanian Relations

Jordan represents the least important country in the Middle East because of its lack of natural resources, oil, and possession of a strategic geographical zone like other Arab countries in the region. It, however, is an island of significant Western influence in comparison to other Western-oriented Arab countries. At the same time, it strives to preserve its independent stance despite its weakness.

Soviet interest in Jordan arose mainly because of Moscow's wish to use it against the West. Jordan's increased importance in the Soviet Union's eyes paralleled King Hussein's initiatives with regard to solution of the Palestinian problem. Thus, whenever the King took an independent view, the Soviets took measures to curb his aspirations.

Soviet-Jordanian relations were essentially based on two issues. The first was Jordan's position toward the Palestinian problem, and the second was the Soviet position vis-a-vis border disputes. The most crucial was the first one.

To comprehend the importance of the first issue, we must recall that in the aftermath of the Six Day War in 1967, the importance of the Palestinian problem increased. The Soviet leadership understood that the guerrilla clashes

in Lebanon and the Jordanian government's conflict with the PLO could be used ". . . as a useful tool for weakening the pro-Western regimes and replacing them with governments more friendly to the USSR.³⁶ The Soviets saw the potential in the PLO because of its radical views that resembled Marxist-Leninist ideology, its importance to the Arabs with regard to the Arab-Israeli dispute, and its ability to represent the hardcore that would unite the Arabs against the West.

In regard with the substantive issue itself, King Hussein's efforts to conduct an independent policy meant achieving influence over the Palestinians in the West Bank. King Hussein found instances in which he won support of other Arab leaders like Sadat in July 1975 (support later repudiated in September 1974 and at the subsequent Morocco summit of Arab leaders later the same year³⁷) or later on Mubarak in 1984.³⁸ He also held implicit talks with Israel and the US in regard to a Jordanian delegation to conduct negotiations, and implicit talks with Israel's Prime Minister.³⁹ Another source of concern to the Soviets was a reconciliation between Hussein and Arafat⁴⁰ which had a pro-Western cast to it.

Soviet reaction to Hussein's line of operation was to endorse and stress loudly the Palestinian right of self-determination and their eventual right to a state as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian cause."

This policy was aimed at undermining Hussein's independent policy and to signal to the other Arabs that the Soviets backed their position at the Arab leaders' summit meeting in Morocco at the end of 1974.⁴¹

By supporting the Arab mainstream, the Soviets sought to isolate Jordan. With such tactics, the Soviets achieved their goal.

In regard to the second issue, the Syrian-Jordan border dispute, it was obvious that the Soviets would support radical Syria which provided the Soviets a firm foothold in the region and was the leader of the anti-imperialist front. For example, in September 1970, later on referred to as "Black September," Jordan inflicted a severe beating on both Syria and the Palestinians. Soviet support of the Syrians was adamant because of the firm support by the United States and Israel of Jordan. Israel was even willing to commit her forces against the Syrians.

A good illustration came in 1980, when the tension arose between Syria and Jordan over Assad's claim that Jordan provided a base for the Muslim Brotherhood for attacks on his regime. In this case, the Soviets supported the Syrians, but they did not go further than verbal support. In a way, the Soviets were caught with tied hands because of a shrewd move by Assad who had signed a friendship and cooperation treaty with the USSR a month earlier (i.e., this treaty was not signed because of Assad's isolation but

supported his goal with respect to Jordan).

But Soviet support of Syria always left a leeway to Jordan, for Moscow envisioned ties with Jordan as a means to broaden the Soviet base of operations in the Middle East.⁴²

It seemed that the Soviet position against Jordan might push Jordan into the arms of the West, but King Hussein's policy was tied to the Arab countries, which supported him economically. More importantly, the king sought to play the US and the USSR off against each other to achieve greater advantage for Jordan.

As a derivative of this "zig-zag" policy, King Hussein visited Moscow in September 1976 to seek economic and military aid. This visit, however, led to increased cooperation with the West. The visit enabled King Hussein to obtain the arms deal with the US that he wanted.⁴³ King Hussein visited Moscow again in May 1981 (perhaps because of the previously mentioned tensions with Syria). But this time the Soviets scored a major success, for King Hussein accepted military and economic aid from them.⁴⁴

The other side of King Hussein's zig-zag policy was viewed in May 1985. On a Washington visit, he supported the USSR's declared policy in favor of an international conference on the Middle East with the participation of the Soviet Union.⁴⁵

As a result of Hussein's traditional orientation toward the West and Jordan's minor status as an Arab country, Soviet relations with it and aid to it were insignificant. Jordan succeeded in maintaining herself as an Arab mainstream country which avoided total alignment with the West or with the Soviets and the anti-radical front led by Syria.

Jordan, in short, provides a good example of a Middle East country that succeeded in implementing an independent policy by finding gaps between the superpowers. Soviet tactics and tools of influence were unable to overcome King Hussein's survival ability. At the same time, Jordan never posed a serious obstacle to Soviet policy in the Middle East.

NOTES

CHAPTER IV

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CHAPTER V

GORBACHEV'S NEW OUTLOOK

General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev took power in March 1985. From the first moment he arrived in power, he chose a line of operation different from his that of his predecessors. The differences encompassed both internal and external issues, thus attracting the world to a unique phenomenon since the Communist Revolution in 1917.

In order to convey the nature of the changes, I will summarize briefly the situation that Gorbachev found when he came to power, discuss the degree of change in all four of the Soviets' influence methods, and conclude with the changes in Gorbachev's outlook toward to the Middle East since 1985.

The Soviet Union's Situation

Internally, the Soviet Union suffered from a bad economic situation. Productivity had gone down, consumer goods were almost unavailable, growth rates had fallen sharply in the economy as a whole and in the long-favored industrial sector. The Soviet economy lacked a sufficiently high technological level in its final products to enable it to export in the world market. Soviet products were virtually unsaleable there. The national standard of living had declined and random shortages, black markets and queues were pervasive. "A kind of malaise seemed to beset the

populace: reduced work effort, widespread alcoholism, rampant corruption and a burgeoning underground economy."¹ Such a situation caused turmoil and internal discontent and resentment in the Soviet Union.

Hence, resolving the situation became the key factor of success for any new General Secretary. In the global arena, this state of affairs caused an unflattering posture for Soviet socialism and could threaten the Soviet Union's continued status as a superpower. Moreover, the traditional use of economic aid as a penetrating method was thrown into question.

In the military arena, Gorbachev did inherit a very strong empire which had achieved strategic parity with the U.S. It had also shown a growing willingness to become involved in military conflicts, either with Cuban troops, or, in the case of Afghanistan, even Soviet troops.

Military aid had been used as the primary method of gaining influence in the Third World. ". . . with an increased power projection capability and capacity to supply military hardware to Third World clients, Brezhnev's Politburo hoped the correlation of forces would shift in their favour. . . ."² Indeed, military means had spread Soviet influence all over the world, although in the Middle East area it succeeded only with Syria, who had received vast economic aid, as well.

Nevertheless, the huge reliance on military instruments was a two-edged sword. Military resources had precedence over consumer goods and consumer industries. This state of affairs contributed to the economic decline, in addition to creating a military elite which will oppose future changes in the military status.³ Furthermore, many countries which got military aid had difficulties paying for it, thus increasing the Soviet deficit.

The invasion of Afghanistan also had deleterious effects for the Soviet Union. It caused a setback in diplomatic relations with the West. By oppressing an Islamic entity, it drew criticism from the Arabs and reduced Soviet credibility in the Middle East. Finally, because the USSR was unable to end the war with a military victory, it damaged their image abroad.

In short, it seemed that the military tool of penetrating had reached the limit of its effectiveness. It was inflicting damage on the Soviet internal economy, and it was undermining the USSR's external influence on major issues. In the Third World specifically, the military tool had proved beneficial in more radical countries (Vietnam, Libya, Cuba, Angola, Syria), but it had been a liability with respect to moderate countries like Egypt.

Gorbachev's New Political Thinking (Novoe Myshlenie)

The new outlook that Gorbachev expressed from the very beginning proved that he was well aware of the Soviet Union's situation. Radical measures, he saw, needed to be taken in order to alter the situation and to maintain the USSR's position as a superpower.

Gorbachev faced both an economic setback and diplomatic resentment caused essentially by the intervention in Afghanistan. The questions that confronted him were how to make Russia richer without making it much more democratic, decentralization overcoming internal opposition and national unrest that could be caused by the changes.

To reach his goals, Gorbachev carried out a coordinated policy that addressed the economic problems and the foreign affairs issues simultaneously.

Gorbachev coined two phrases which became the flag in front of his camp and altered the frozen communist ideology. One was "glasnost," the encouragement of openness and candor in the interests of socialism. That enabled much more liberal debates, reports in the mass media of a sort unfamiliar until then, and even revelations of failures in the system. The other was "perestroika," the umbrella of "restructuring" under which glasnost fits. Restructuring was to encompass the economy, society, foreign relations, etc.

Gorbachev's measures with respect to the Soviet economy included a new policy of resource allocation for heavy industries which literally meant fewer resources to the military establishment and increased production of consumer goods. He tried to mitigate the impact on the army by integrating the military more into the broader policy process and by scrutinizing military requests and weighing them against competing economic and political priorities.⁴

In addition, Gorbachev sought to introduce Western management techniques, technology, quality control and access to marketing networks.⁵

Gorbachev is aware that the key factor to his survival is economic success and support from the people. His policy of increased consumption for the Soviet population and the development of high technology is also linked to Soviet national security interests.

One way to insure the flow of modern technology was improvement of foreign relationships. Gorbachev conducted a worldwide diplomatic effort to this end, an initiative unprecedented in Soviet affairs. His main effort was aimed at the U.S., but it extended well beyond the US too. He expanded negotiations on reduction of nuclear and conventional forces and eased the menace of a war in central Europe, thus swinging European public opinion in his favor. He also gained further support in Europe and elsewhere after the withdrawal from Afghanistan. Gorbachev, in sum, realized the advantages that he could achieve for the USSR

and for himself by stressing a more flexible foreign policy that relied more heavily on political-diplomatic means.⁶

A crucial step that Gorbachev took in order to achieve support for his new outlook was to gain control of the CPSU apparatus and of the military hierarchy. "He purged oldtimers and old thinkers from the Politburo and Central Committee, had himself elected President and proceeded to call into question . . . assumptions of Soviet political life."⁷

It can be said that to date Gorbachev has had the backing he needs to operate his restructuring despite, economic failure, national unrest, and military dissent.

The current economic situation has not fulfilled either the people's or the leaders' expectations, and it can be argued that Gorbachev's days in office are numbered. But, on the other hand, the USSR is not a "backward" country. In terms of potential resources, it may be far better positioned to expand its economic strength in the twenty-first century than any other country in the world.⁸ In addition, the Soviet Union has huge oil reserves, and it is the only major industrialized nation that is self-sufficient in energy.

Gorbachev's new thinking affected the way Russia exerts its influence and attempts to achieve its global objectives. Traditional Soviet penetrating methods--ideology, diplomatic policy, military aid, and economic aid--were modified by Gorbachev.

Two key factors shaped Gorbachev's new thinking toward the Third World. First, was the USSR's economic deficit and deteriorated economy, in addition to the huge debts owed to it by Third World countries that had difficulties making repayments. Second was the knowledge that a continuation of tense relations with the United States caused by Soviet support of radical regimes came back to haunt them when they wanted to negotiate on more important things like arms control.⁹

These considerations affected the Soviet employment of the traditional tools of influence. The ideological tool, which had been used as a key means of penetrating Third World countries, was addressed in a new light. Marxist-Leninist communism in its rigid form had already been dissipated by glasnost and perestroika. Facing the fact that support of radical regimes had increased confrontations with the U.S. and stood contrary to the desire for worldwide peace and solution of problems through understanding of the other side's security problems led to a new approach. Specifically, it raised the issue of whether or not the Kremlin should continue to support indigenous Marxist-Leninist groups.¹⁰

Although it can be said that Soviet ideology had always been used in a pragmatic manner, it is evident that Gorbachev's "novoe myshlenie" is welcomed by the majority of the Middle East countries. Thus, Gorbachev's new interpretation of the rigid ideology has enabled him to make

better use of the diplomatic instrument. Gorbachev has conducted a benign policy seeking to highlight mutual interests and to solve problems through joint endeavor as well as unilateral recognition.

Politically, Soviet support for radical Third World movements and those movements' involvement in regional conflicts had perpetuated confrontational policies that Moscow now acknowledges were dangerous.¹¹ Instead, "Gorbachev is employing a political strategy to increase . . . influence in the Third World in competition with the U.S."¹² The situation in the Middle East is a concrete case where radical actions might be taken to reach a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict; nonetheless, Gorbachev's actual policy has contributed to the easing of the tense atmosphere in there, won plaudits for Soviet diplomacy, enhanced the opportunity of reaching a comprehensive solution to the conflict, and had a positive impact on the USSR's economic problems.

Gorbachev has adopted many of the West's favorite buzz words, like stability, reasonable sufficiency, mutual security to promote Soviet strategy.¹³ In regard to economic aid, he has altered Brezhnev's policy, which demanded immense resources and caused a large part of the Soviet economic problems. The USSR now seeks ties with countries that can contribute to its economy--Israel, for example--and pushes for repayment of past debts. Gorbachev understands that the benefits the USSR got from Third World countries

were volatile. Indeed, it did not obtain its ruble's worth from Egypt, Afghanistan and Ethiopia. Consequently, Moscow has told Syria to keep up to date with its payments and has also rescheduled Egypt's repayments.¹⁴

With respect to Gorbachev's economic policy in the Middle East, however, it can be said that his hands are somewhat tied. Syria, the USSR's main ally, needs and gets economic aid. In regard to Egypt, only the Soviets can lose from not having relations with it. As far as Israel is concerned, it seems that the USSR as well as Israel will benefit from economic relations, if and when Gorbachev makes a decisive diplomatic gesture toward the Israel.

Overall, Gorbachev is not rejecting use of the economic method. He is ready to fulfill Soviet superpower pretensions, but he seeks to find a golden path which will not place the USSR at the end as a milk cow but will enable it to harvest the fruits of its investments.

Employment of the last tool, the military one, has not changed a lot. Although Russia is not willing to increase tension with the United States, Gorbachev uses the military instrument with extraordinary shrewdness to achieve strategic ends that will solve Russia's problems. Furthermore, with this tool, Gorbachev also tries to find the golden mean either by halting advanced and expensive weapons to Syria or by offering Jordan MiG-29s to gain influence.¹⁵ The military tool is considered the most flexible and handy, for it uses military surpluses, hence

enabling the USSR to obtain hard currency.

In conclusion, Gorbachev's "novoe myshlenie" is a significant change in the way Soviet leaders have ruled. Whether Gorbachev's way of saving communism and Mother Russia is transforming society and repairing deformations of the Russian political character that go back centuries will redeem communism and still be communism is still questioned¹⁶, but it is clear that a significant shift has occurred. Even if Gorbachev fails in his attempts to restructure the Soviet economy (which is the key factor in his success or failure), it is obvious that he is qualified as a political genius who opened a narrow window on the Soviet darkness.

In my opinion, Gorbachev is held prisoner in his own enlightened "prison." He cannot stop implementing advanced ideas that shock Eastern Europe and the USSR because he is running down the slope in front of a big snowball which he created. Once he stops, the snowball will reach him . . . Maybe the only way is to step aside, to resign peacefully.

The Middle East in Gorbachev's Era

Having elaborated on Gorbachev's new outlook, it is time to concentrate on his Middle East influence. It can be argued whether the Middle East region is more important to the Soviet Union than the Third World as a whole, whether Gorbachev has paid less attention to the Third World in comparison to other parts of the world or whether he has downgraded the importance of the Third World in Soviet foreign policy, but it is evident that his activist policy combined with the modified and more benign communist ideology have found reflection in the USSR's dealing with the Third World countries.¹⁷

My opinion is that Gorbachev's interest in the Third World is more vigorous yet more flexible than that of previous Soviet leaders, and it seems that Gorbachev is "determined to continue an ambitious, albeit less dangerous, course in the Third World."¹⁸ To be sure, the Middle East countries which this work is dealing are less important to Gorbachev than the Third World as a whole and even less important than Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Iran. Nevertheless, Gorbachev's new thinking has brought significant changes in the Middle East which are in line with his globalism and his desire to improve Soviet posture as a superpower.

Soviet policy toward the region has sought to gain back political recognition of the USSR by all the parties in the area. That policy will permit it to have an equal part

to the United States in finding a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute, an undertaking from which it was excluded after the 1973 war. At the same time, the Soviets continue to embrace traditional ends--military facilities, prestige, undermining the US role in the area, and obtaining economic revenues.

Lessons learned in the past have shown the USSR as well as the United States that Middle East countries carry on policies designed to serve their own self-interests. The Soviet Union faced this reality especially in the case of Egypt, which abrogated a friendship treaty (1976) and suspended repayment of military and economic debts. Furthermore, the Soviets have encountered resentment based on religious contradictions--atheist communism and non-atheistic Muslim countries. The apex of this came after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan which produced severe censure by Arab countries¹⁹ and showed dramatically that money cannot buy everything. It seems that Gorbachev's recent meeting with the Pope is an effort to mitigate the rift between communism and Soviet atheism.²⁰

Overall, the Soviets believe that in an era of power balance between East and West, Middle East countries can play both cards, thus leaving a superpower with empty hands and deficits. Therefore, the Soviets' new policy must assess carefully the way to approach the countries (from now on "countries" refers to Egypt, Israel, Syria, and Jordan) in order to achieve tangible benefits in addition to global

achievements.

Gorbachev's main course in the area derives from his global peace policy. He is trying to downgrade military tension in favor of solutions based on mutual understanding. On the other hand, he is not neglecting the current communist ideology, which has to deal with Syria and the Palestinian problem. His policy can be described as "tactically adroit, opportunistic, and attuned to public opinion in the West."²¹

Gorbachev's new outlook has influenced the "countries" in many ways. Each has been approached in accordance with its particular needs in order to complete his complex picture. The succeeding sections of this chapter will elaborate the approach taken toward each country and the mutual benefits obtained from Gorbachev's new outlook.

Egypt

Egypt, as was mentioned before, has been a prime target of Soviet endeavors for three major reasons: 1) It has traditionally had a leading role in the Arab world. 2) It possesses military facilities that the Soviets came to appreciate. 3) Egypt has a substantial economic debt to the USSR, which has an impact on the Soviet economy.

On the eve of Gorbachev's advent to office, the USSR a policy of isolation toward Egypt because of its participation in a separate peace process with Israel and the United States.²² The trend that worried the Soviets was Egypt's readmission to the Arab world and to the Islamic world, thus leaving the Soviets in the Middle East isolated with a non-influential radical party, Syria. As a matter of fact, this trend started to show up when frequent meetings between Mubarak and Hussein took place. Then Egypt was readmitted to the Islamic Conference in 1984 and to the Islamic Development Bank in early February 1985.²³

Gorbachev's new outlook focused on the restoration of Soviet-Egyptian relations. In the diplomatic arena, the USSR's new Egyptian policy should be addressed in the context of the Soviet wish to decrease U.S. influence in the Middle East. Egypt was supporting a solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute that included the moderate countries (Israel, Jordan), the PLO, Egypt, and the United States but excluded the USSR, yet Egypt still gaining support from the Arab world. Consequently, the USSR felt that it had to

change its policy toward Egypt.

Seeking to make the best of the situation, Moscow acknowledged the inevitability of Egypt's rejoining the Arab mainstream. This shift led to an improvement in Soviet-Egyptian economic relations. In early 1987, the Soviets agreed to eliminate the obstacle of the Egyptian debt. They agreed in principle to Egypt's conditions, which included generous terms for the following 19 years.²⁴ This agreement was coupled with a cultural protocol, a long-term trade pact, and a reopening of Soviet consulates in Alexandria and Port Said.²⁵

From then on, Soviet-Egyptian relations improved gradually. The Soviets made clear their preference for an international conference and in addition increased their support for the Palestinian cause, which gained importance because of the "intifada"²⁶ Nevertheless, Soviet policy stressed a just solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute that would consider all parties' security needs, and this was compatible with Mubarak's attempts at resolving the conflict. Specifically, he recommended getting the parties involved (Israel, PLO representatives agreeable to all parties, etc.) in direct talks in Cairo under active mediation of the US. Thus, the gap between the Soviets and Egypt was decreased. "Moscow decided to work with Egypt and capitalize on its increased influence in the Arab world to help arrange for the conference or as a minimum to politically isolate and bring diplomatic pressure on Israel

and the United States, who continued to oppose the conference.²⁷

Further improvement included the visit of Soviet Foreign Minister, Edvard Shevardnadze, to Egypt in early 1989.²⁸ This visit "legitimized Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak's policies . . . thus putting Egypt, not Syria, at the center of Middle East diplomacy."²⁹

From Egypt's standpoint, it has retained its independent policy, which seeks to make Egypt central in the eyes of the Western world and to improve her stance as the leader of the Arab world. Mubarak's proposals for a peace process were not in line with Soviet policy, for if accepted, they would sidetrack the Soviet plan for an international conference.³⁰ Nevertheless, Moscow has kept a low profile on the issue in order to maintain good relations with the West and Egypt.

Once the Soviets recognized the importance of Egypt to the peace process, the USSR urged the radicals to mitigate their opposition and join the mainstream. "Shevardnadze emphasized the need for Syria to improve its ties with the PLO, Iraq, and Egypt. He also urged a meeting between the representatives of Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, and the PLO."³¹

The recent improvement in Egyptian-Syrian relations as a result of Syria's unhappiness with its isolated position in the region has brought Assad closer than ever to Mubarak. It is increasingly difficult to foresee to what

extent Assad's new approach will contribute to the peace process, but it is evident that Gorbachev's flexible policy toward Egypt has done so.

In sum, Soviet-Egyptian relations in the Gorbachev era have improved greatly and set the stage for active Soviet participation in the Middle East process with the acquiescence of Egypt. These mutual improvements are due to the Real Politik carried out by both leaders, Gorbachev and Mubarak. Egypt obtained some help in coping with its economic problems and got Soviet recognition of its political stance, while the Soviets found a way to deal with Egypt's repayments, associated itself with an increasingly influential country in the Arab world, and reinforced its global posture vis-a-vis the West in regard to the peace process in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, in my opinion, the value of the rapprochement to the two sides differs. Egypt's advantages are volatile, whereas the USSR's are dependable, due to Egypt's ability to maneuver between the US and the USSR.

Israel

Israel is viewed by the Soviet Union as the country with the most pro-Western orientation in the Middle East. Improvement of relations with Israel would therefore serve Soviet interests especially vis-a-vis the United States, by assisting Gorbachev's efforts to restructure the Soviet economy with the help of the West.

What are the other benefits to the Soviet Union? First, mutual relations with Israel would show Soviet ability to gain a foothold even in the strongest U.S. ally in the Middle East, thus downgrading US influence in the region. Second, it would enhance the USSR's ability to play a mediator role in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and it would confirm the USSR's major and inevitable importance for any comprehensive settlement worldwide. Third, it would improve Soviet chances to persuade Israel to accept international conferences as a way to solve the Arab-Israeli dispute. Such acceptance, in turn, would mitigate the Arab world's hard feelings and concern about Soviet relations with Israel. (I subscribe to the proposition that the Soviet insistence on an international conference is merely lip service to England and France in order to induce them to pressure the United States to accept the idea. In my opinion, Gorbachev would gladly agree to a bipolar conference between the USSR and the United States.) Fourth, bilateral economic connections would be beneficial to both

countries and, in addition, would have merits for the Soviet Union from a technological standpoint.

All these benefits are not costfree to the Soviets with respect to the Arab world. Rapprochement with Israel would be perceived as going astray from communist ideology and can be visualized as betrayal of the Arab cause, especially in regard to the Palestinian problem.

The second party in this matter, Israel, would also confront a mixture of advantages and disadvantages. The advantages include: 1) Recognition by the Soviets could contribute to recognition of Israel by the Arab world hence enabling it to attain the level of security that it needs. 2) It could help ensure the emigration of Russian Jews, a factor considered vital to the evolution and security of Israel. 3) It could lessen the probability of war in the Middle East. 4) It could bring subsequent economic advantages. 5) It would permit Israel to play both the US and the USSR cards. 6) It would facilitate a solution to the Palestinian problem which can be characterized as a compromise settlement.

The disadvantages entailed for Israel in the existence of Soviet-Israeli relations are the constraints that it would place on the freedom of independent maneuver. Russian Jews wishing to emigrate could be held as hostages to achieve a solution favorable to the Palestinians, in regard to the Palestinian problem. In addition, a worldwide relaxation of tensions coupled with calm relations among the

Middle Eastern countries could cause a shift in the superpowers' interests away from the region and toward the major oil countries in the Middle East, thus leading to a reduction in the support Israel would get from the United States.

In any case, Israel has been reacting in accord with Gorbachev's policy, and her advantages derive from his initiatives. Gorbachev was the first General Secretary who actively pursued expanded ties with Tel Aviv and offered concessions to Israel in order to enhance Moscow's regional flexibility and international credibility.

Gorbachev's new policy toward Israel evolved gradually and went through a number of steps. An ambassadorial meeting in Paris in the summer of 1985 and an agreement by Hungary and Poland but sanctioned by Gorbachev³² to enter into economic relations led to the first official meeting between Soviet and Israeli representatives in nearly 20 years in Helsinki, Finland, in August 1986. The first official meeting between Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze and Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres took place in the United States in September 1986.³³ The main issues discussed were raised by Peres and tied Soviet participation in an international conference with resumption of diplomatic relations.³⁴

In the same period, Soviet propaganda became less strident. The congratulatory message of Israeli President Chaim Hertzog's to the USSR on the 40th anniversary of the

Allied victory over Nazi Germany was published³⁵ and the Soviet press stopped the comparison between Israel and Nazi Germany. The publication of this message seemed to be a major reversal of Soviet policy on the issue.³⁶

The evolution of diplomatic relations culminated with the exchange of consular delegations to Tel Aviv in July 1987 and an Israeli consular delegation to the USSR in early 1988.³⁷ Hand in hand with these developments went an increase in Jewish emigration from the USSR. The number of 8,000 emigrants in 1987 grew to 19,343 in 1988³⁸, and to a projected number of 100,000 for 1990. It seemed that the Soviets' main target here was not Israel but the United States. The Soviets wanted the U.S. to reconsider changes in the Jackson-Vanik and Stevenson Amendments linking trade concessions to unrestrained Jewish emigration.³⁹

In the diplomatic arena, Gorbachev applied his philosophy emphasizing peaceful problem-solving means. He asserted in front of Syrian President Assad, in April 1987, that an absence of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Israel could not be considered normal. Moreover, he opposed the idea of solving the Arab-Israeli conflict militarily, implicitly avoiding support for Syria's strategic parity with Israel.⁴⁰ Later on, in June 1988, Gorbachev clearly said that ". . . there can be no security of one at the expense of the other. A solution that would untie this very tight knot should be found."⁴¹

It should be noted that the shift in Soviet policy toward Israel took place despite the tightening of Israel's links with the US. This was evidenced by the signing of strategic cooperation and free trade agreements, and by Israeli acquiescence to the opening of a Voice of America transmitter on Israeli territory, and by Israel's participation in the American Star Wars defense scheme.⁴²

Despite the USSR's growing overtures to Israel, Moscow had to maneuver because of her relations with and obligations to the Arab world. The main issue on which the Soviets felt they must render support was the Palestinian problem. The Soviets did try to temper the approach of PLO leader Yasser Arafat to Israel by telling him in April 1988 that Israel's security should be taken into consideration in any peace settlement.⁴³, and Gorbachev did limit himself to the more ambiguous term "self-determination," instead of the previous terms "sole legitimate" and "Palestinian state."⁴⁴

Nevertheless, the Soviets backed Arafat's declaration of a Palestinian state, supported the "intifada" (the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories), and continued in to vote in the U.N. to exclude Israel.⁴⁵ Gorbachev also expressed solidarity with the Palestinian Liberation Organization when the US refused to give Arafat a visa to visit and to address the U.N.⁴⁶ This was followed by Izvestia's publication of a critical article on Israel's "terror" in the occupied territories.⁴⁷

Gorbachev's dual policy of taking into consideration all parties' needs and of pushing for an international conference found expression in Soviet behavior after Arafat recognized Israel in December 1988. The Soviets supported Arafat's declaration but expressed concern that the USSR would be excluded from the peace process, as it had been in the case of the Egyptian-Israeli treaty.⁴⁸

Nonetheless, Soviet-Israeli relations continued to improve. In his speech at the United Nations in December 1988, Gorbachev referred to the struggle in the Middle East as "indeed an honest struggle of ideology, but it must not be carried over into mutual relations between states."⁴⁹ Visas were issued to Israeli tourists on a regular basis, an Israeli consular delegation went to Moscow, Soviet archives on the Holocaust were opened, and the emigration of Soviet Jews increased.⁵⁰ In August 1988, Israeli Agriculture Minister Catz-Oz met with Soviet representatives, and in September 1989 Israeli Foreign Minister Moishe Arens and Shevardnadze held talks at the U.N.⁵¹ That same month, Genghis Iatematov, Chairman of the Cultural Committee of the Supreme Soviet and a close advisor to Gorbachev, called for the Soviet Union and Israel to immediately renew full diplomatic relations without any preconditions.⁵² A major shift in Soviet attitude toward Israel was the USSR's refusal on October 17, 1989, for the first time to support an Arab-sponsored resolution aimed at ousting Israel from the General Assembly in the U.N.⁵³ The latest diplomatic

visit to the U.S.S.R. was made by Ezer Weizmann, Minister of Science, in January 1990. His meeting got open coverage in the Soviet mass media but was ended in disagreement over the PLO. Foreign Minister Shevardnadze stated at the end of the visit that the PLO's level of representatiin would be raised to the ambassadorial level.

To date, Gorbachev has laid foundations to resume relations with Israel. His main concerns about taking the first step are the reactions of the Arab world, which he has tryied to mitigate by fostering a favorable front led by Egypt with the participation of Syria, and Soviet commitment to a just solution to the Palestinian problem. In the latter regard "to restore relations without Israeli concessions on the occupied territories would amount to a breach of Soviet commitments to Syria and the others.⁵⁴

After saying this, however, it is important to remember that Gorbachev's main efforts are aimed at the United States. The USSR can reap economic advantages from the state of Soviet-Israeli relations. But Gorbachev's chief concern now is Soviet participation in a conference to solve the Arab-Israeli dispute. Such participation depends heavily on the USSR's resumption of diplomatic relations with Israel.

Meanwhile, Gorbachev's diplomatic minuet in the Middle East is bound to changes within Egypt and Syria, the bilateral talks between the US and Israel in regard to the Palestinian problem, and, foremost in importance, Gorb-

achev's domestic problems (national unrest and a new phase of communism). Nevertheless, Gorbachev has set the stage flexibly enough to address any development in the region to Soviet benefit. His policy allows him to wait to harvest the fruits of his new thinking.

Syria

Syria has been the major beneficiary of Soviet aid. As the most radical country in the region, she provided a substantial foothold in the Middle East for the Soviet Union. In return, the USSR backed up Syria militarily and economically with aid that enabled her to survive after the defeats that she suffered from Israel. The years after the 1982 war in Lebanon were characterized by particularly massive military aid intended to give Syria achieving parity with Israel.

A look at the mutual benefits of this relationship and points of disagreement between the Soviet Union and Syria on the eve of Gorbachev's assumption of power will establish a baseline for examining the changes that the Soviet policy has undergone since he came to office. Syria was important to the Soviets for a variety of reasons: 1) It provided facilities for the Soviet navy. 2) It had a leader who adamantly supported the "steadfastness and confrontation" front opposing the United States and excluded Egypt, thus setting an anti-imperialist tone.⁵⁵; 3) The fact that only the Soviets could talk with Syria made the Soviets an important party in the projected comprehensive peace negotiations. 4) Syria served to keep the Middle East in a state of low-level conflict which was vital to the USSR's interventionist policy; 5) Syria had relations with Iran, thereby permitting the Soviets to be involved in a

balanced way in the Iran-Iraq war (the Soviets had direct relations with Iraq, whereas the Syrians had direct relations with Iran).⁵⁶

Syria's benefits from the situation were: 1) The relationship assured Syria vast military and economic aid. 2) Syria was treated by the Soviets as the leader of the Arab states⁵⁷, and 3) It was able to implement an independent policy in Lebanon.

On the other hand, points of disagreement between the two sides were far from lacking. Some of the issues were: 1) Syria's unwillingness to compromise isolated the Soviets as a possible mediator in the Middle East. 2) Its military policy could cause a military conflict which might expand into a superpower conflict. 3) Syria's inability to pay her enormous debt put a burden on the Soviet economy. 4) Syria's resentment of the PLO led by Arafat collided with Soviet policy toward the PLO.

After Gorbachev assumed power, he clearly adopted a new policy. It was based on Egypt's role in the Middle East and on the growing importance of the PLO. This shift reflected Gorbachev's desire to become a legitimate partner in the negotiations for a peace settlement and his fear of a regional conflict in the atomic era.⁵⁸

The improvement of relations between the Soviets and Israel produced negative reactions among the USSR's Arab allies, especially Syria. To Damascus, this development signaled a major change in Soviet-Syrian relations.

This judgment was borne out by Gorbachev's policy of calming regional confrontation between Syria and Israel. After the U.S. attack on Libya in 1986 in retaliation for the latter's support of terrorist activities, for example, the Soviets cautioned Syria against further terrorism "in order not to give the imperialists any pretexts for attacks."⁵⁹

But the major shift in Soviet policy toward Syria occurred during Assad's visit to Moscow in 1987. During mutual talks, Gorbachev made it clear that the Soviets would pursue relations with Israel and urged Assad to think of settling the Arab-Israeli dispute through negotiations.⁶⁰ Assad's desire for a strategic parity suffered a setback.

The growing legitimacy that Mubarak was gaining for within the Arab world and the intifada that started at the end of 1987 weakened further weakened Syria's position. Both encouraged the USSR to concentrate on the moderate front.

Moscow's gradual improvement of relations with Egypt evoked serious opposition from Syria and Libya. To offset this, the Soviets signed a new arms deal with Syria during 1988, in return for which they gained rights for their fleet in Tartus.⁶¹

Nevertheless, it seems that this arms deals was the swan song. Henceforth, the Syrians lost ground. Militarily, the USSR rejected Syria's request for SS-23 missiles; the INF treaty provided a good excuse.⁶² From the

diplomatic standpoint, Shevardnadze's visit to the region in February 1989 carried forward Gorbachev's previously mentioned policy. Indeed, the Foreign Minister met Mubarak and Arafat in Cairo in order to find a way to implement Mubarak's policy in the region, hence "putting Egypt, not Syria, at the center of Middle East diplomacy."⁶³ In economic terms, the Soviets tightened their disbursements of economic aid. For instance, the Soviets insisted that Syria, not the USSR pay for the Western machinery needed for the extraction of natural gas at Tadmur.⁶⁴

Assad, a shrewd and pragmatic politician, saw the handwriting on the wall. He was paying the price of his ties with the Soviet Union and becoming isolated. Worse yet, he was losing his priority in the eyes of the Soviets.⁶⁵

Assad now determined to accommodate himself to the changes by agreeing on reconciliation with Egypt. The revival of relations between Syria and Egypt would leave him enough leeway to influence the Arab world and the projected peace negotiations.⁶⁶ In addition, it would enable him to protect Syrian interests in the Golan Heights through his participation in the negotiations.

Whether this move will improve peace possibilities in the region is still open to question and of concern to Israel.⁶⁷ But, in my opinion, this shift should be viewed as positive, for it derives from a shift in the policy of Assad's patron--the Soviet Union.

In conclusion, it is evident that Syria was strongly affected by Gorbachev's new outlook. It is equally clear that relying on one superpower, in contrast with Egypt's approach, put Syria in a bind. Thus the bad shape of Syria's economy, coupled with her heavy reliance on Soviet arms (albeit she did conduct some negotiations with China for arms) may have brought about for the first time a more moderate tone from the most radical country in the region. Whether Assad is the right man to lead this change or can alter his mindset is not the concern of this work. What is important here is that Gorbachev succeeded in achieving a pragmatic result from his new outlook.

Jordan

Jordan is the least significant actor under consideration here in the events that have occurred in the Middle East. Her dependence on the Arab world, coupled with a lack of strategic importance, pushed Jordan into the shadows in regard to the negotiations.

Jordan's preoccupation in the 1970s was how to gain back the West Bank while solving the Palestinian problem--particularistic aims in comparison with the Arab world's main goals. But the decline of Jordan's influence on the West Bank reduced Hussein's legitimacy with respect to this territory and compelled him to try to find a way to accomplish these objectives with other countries in the area: Egypt, Israel or Syria. Obviously, he could not keep his suggestions for a solution to the West Bank problem in line with all the parties involved, for they mainly were considering their own benefits.

This pattern of Jordan's policy faced Gorbachev when he came to power. Gorbachev understood Jordan's aims and approached her with an eye on the USSR's relations with the United States and its commitments to the Palestinian problem. On the other hand, Gorbachev took every opportunity to replace Western influence in Jordan. This move can be seen from the Soviet offer to sell MiG-29s to Jordan after the United States would not sell Jordan the F-16.⁶⁸ On the other hand, Gorbachev opposed any kind of solution of the Palestinian issue that would exclude Soviet

participation in the negotiations and did not involve an international conference.

Hussein's policy in this context could be described as zig-zag. He tried to play all cards. For instance, he declared his support for an international conference during his visit to Washington in 1985⁶⁹, but this support ran contrary to the effort at that time to find a mutual solution between Israel-Jordan and Arafat.⁷⁰ Similarly, Hussein was one of the first leaders to embrace Egypt back into the Arab world in 1984, thereby gaining condemnation from the Soviets⁷¹, but he also contrary improved his relations with Syria in the same year⁷², a move which was probably welcomed by the Soviets.

Relations between Hussein and Arafat reflected the same zig-zag policy. If 1985 symbolized an era of relative understanding, the beginning of 1986 cleared the way for a new rift between them.⁷³ The Soviets immediately tried to exploit this situation by proposing the establishment of a preparatory committee to pave the way for an international conference on the Middle East.⁷⁴

Hussein's rift with Arafat caused Hussein to intensify his efforts to work with Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres. At that time, their notion was to solve the Arab-Israeli problem under the umbrella of an international conference in which Moscow would play a small part and there would be roles for Jordan and a Palestinian delegation from the West Bank.⁷⁵ (Peres advocated this move in return for

increased Jewish immigration from the USSR.)

Peres' political troubles and the eruption of the intifada in December 1987, however, made clear to Hussein that he would not be able to be a major pivot in the process. Hussein, therefore, altered "the diplomatic equation . . . by publically severing Jordan's connection with the West Bank at the end of July."⁷⁶ This decree was followed by Arafat's announcement in Algiers in mid-November 1988 for an independent Palestinian state and his recognition in Switzerland of the state of Israel in December 1988. Hussein's policy, in addition to Arafat's moves, closed a circle of encroachment that isolated Hussein and deprived him of his only tool of influence for the foreseeable future.

In sum, Jordan could not and has not played a major role in the Soviet calculations in the Gorbachevs era. Jordan has been affected by Gorbachev's main emphasis on the other countries. But, it should not be forgotten that Jordan is still figures in the Soviet desire to gain predominance in the region and that Jordan's needs can be addressed at a relatively low cost.

CHAPTER V

NOTES

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CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The Middle East that Gorbachev encountered after he came to power in March 1985 was different from that with which his predecessors had dealt. We can define two main trends that gradually surfaced, commensurate with their increase of importance.

The first trend was growing reliance on diplomatic means. The 1973 War showed that no one side could win a decisive victory and that the price of war was too high. This judgment led to a change in what was viewed as the right solution of the Arab-Israeli dispute. Another contributory factor was the expulsion of the Soviets from Egypt. This resulted in the dominance of the United States in the region. Hence, the Soviets adopted an approach that emphasized diplomatic instruments. Of foremost importance, however, was the peace treaty signed between Egypt and Israel. The treaty was served as vivid proof of the worth of diplomatic means to achieve a settlement.

The second trend was the increasing need for economic improvements of which all the countries of the region. The economic factor became exceedingly important and mitigated rivalries. The handwriting on the wall was obvious. War could put an end to economic gains and halt future progress, thus challenging the survivability of the leaderships.

At Gorbachev's advent to power, then, he was faced with declining Soviet influence in the region and the necessity to modify traditional Soviet tools of influence to give each of them the proper weight it deserved. Gorbachev's new outlook emphasized diplomatic means. His global peace policy, combined with the goal of solving the Soviet economic problems, had major effects on the USSR's approach to the Middle East.

Gorbachev's main efforts were directed at straightening out past disagreements and putting Soviet diplomacy on a rational line that would appeal to moderate Arab countries, Israel, and, especially, the United States, without neglecting Soviet commitment to the PLO. This last commitment, incidentally, is the real soul of Soviet policy in the region. It reflects not only ideological similarities but also the fact that support of the PLO has enabled the Soviets to expand penetration of the region. This consideration has been strengthened by the Palestinian uprising, the intifada, and the waning of Syria's importance as a result of the decline of the radical Arab front.

The biggest shift that Gorbachev carried out, and the fastest one, was toward Israel. Restoring relations with Israel was easy. There were no countries that could affect Israel's acceptance of the Soviets except the United States. But even the United States welcomed an improvement in Soviet-Israeli relations because of the development's projected benefits in terms of Jewish emigration

from the Soviet Union and restriction of terrorist acts.

The change toward Israel can be underlined and summarized by saying that the Soviet Union displays a new openness and spirit of cooperation. Soviet initiatives have included 1) reassurance of and emphasis on Israel's right to exist (conveyed not only to Israel but also to Syria and the PLO), 2) renewal of Jewish emigration in large numbers, 3) economic relations, 4) and gradual improvement in diplomatic relations.

Gorbachev's main achievement vis-a-vis Israel relates to the impact that his overtures have made on the American Jews, the Jewish lobby, the American President and American public opinion. In my opinion, however, the major beneficiary to date from expanded Soviet-Israeli relations is Israel. Israel has derived tangible benefits from these whereas the Soviets could have received the same benefits they have obtained by simply improving their relations with the United States and Western Europe. By the same token, the state of Israel can lose most in case of a deterioration in Soviet-Israeli relations.

Another major change in Soviet policy has concerned the Syrians. When Gorbachev came to power, Syria had high priority in Moscow. She was the leader of the radical Arab front and got any support she needed from the Soviets. But Syrian policy and behavior were not in line with Gorbachev's new global outlook, so subsequently her relations with the Soviets underwent alterations.

Gorbachev's new approach evolved gradually. He weighed the value of the radical Arab front headed by Syria against the moderate Arab front headed by Saudi Arabia, and the incremental growth of Egypt's significance in latter front. Plainly, he decided to downgrade the radical front.

The new policy took several forms. Moscow now emphasized Syria's need to try to solve the Middle East dispute in diplomatic ways, even to the point of compromising on the Golan Heights borders. The Soviets rejected Assad's calls for strategic parity with Israel. Specifically, they denied him greater quantities of MiG-29s and refused to sell surface-to-surface missiles like the SS-23 (such a sale would also have been a violation of the INF treaty with the U.S.). At the same time, the Soviets maintained their economic aid to Syria in order to enable it to recover economically. By doing so, they took off some pressures that could cause military conflicts, but they also promoted developments that would make possible repayments of Syria's debts to the Soviet Union. Finally, Moscow lent increased backing to Arafat in the ongoing rivalry between Assad and Arafat.

Because of Syria's close ties with the Soviets and its weak links to other international actors in the region, the USSR had no difficulty in reversing its policy in order to tailor that policy both to global and regional changes. Moreover, the Soviet policy shift has already pushed Syria toward the moderate Arab front, especially Egypt. As ment-

ioned previously, some tentative negotiations have even been conducted between Israel and Syria.

In sum, it seems that Gorbachev's new outlook for the first time altered the way that Syria looks forward to a possible solution. Gorbachev's policy succeeded in easing the atmosphere and the level of tension in the region.

The major country in the region, Egypt, has been handled differently. Her ability, backed by US military and economic aid, to conduct independent politics, ending with her reacceptance into the Arab world, posed a challenge to Gorbachev. Thus, Gorbachev's approach has been tailored to gain as much as possible and to establish a basis for better relations in the future.

The main improvement has been in the economic area. Gorbachev agreed to reschedule Egypt's debt repayments as long as he could tighten Soviet relations with Egypt and get her blessing for the participation in the diplomatic process. To facilitate the last, Gorbachev has also recognized Egypt's leadership role within the Arab world. Whether the Soviets will obtain access to naval facilities and at what price is still an open question, but the Soviets have laid the foundations for further improvements in their position.

In the larger regional context, the USSR has embraced Egypt's approach toward the solution of the Palestinian problem as more realistic than Syria's. The mix of Soviet commitments to the PLO, in accordance with

ideological support of national and radical movements, and Gorbachev's global view of eliminating obstacles through negotiation has prompted this shift. Egypt, thus, has replaced Syria as the ram's horn of the Arab cause in Soviet eyes.

In sum, Soviet-Egyptian relations have improved as the result of a decision by Gorbachev. No longer are these characterized by the patron-client aspects of the past. Egypt is now accepted as a state that should be approached properly in order to improve the USSR's posture, for Egypt can today play both a US and a Soviet card.

Of all the countries addressed here, Jordan has been least affected by the modifications in Soviet policies under Gorbachev. The explanation for this state of affairs is fairly simple. Albeit the Soviets tried to fill gaps in the Western support of Jordan, with weapons and economic aid, the Soviets never succeeded in having a significant stake in this country. Jordan's degree of importance to the USSR varied in accordance with its role in the Palestinian problem. Hussein's policy toward the Palestinian issue tended traditionally to reflect a Western-oriented solution, as well as, of course, one which would suit his aspirations to gain the most from Judea and Samaria. Such a policy brought Soviet condemnation.

Nevertheless, Gorbachev seeks to create a common denominator with Jordan in order to be accepted by all the parties in the Middle East as a legitimate mediator in fut-

ure diplomatic efforts in the region. He perceives that a solution undertaken without consideration of Hussein will result in a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute which will at best be of uncertain value.

To date, then, it seems that Gorbachev's new outlook in the Middle East region has set a new framework for relations there. The USSR is accepted as a rational superpower that contributes to the stability of the area, can help the countries in solving their economic problems, and can act in an even-handed manner when dealing with the Middle East countries. The patron-client dimensions of past ties have been replaced by attitudes of mutual understanding that do not undermine the countries. Hence more opportunities have been opened up for the Soviets.

Albeit the major improvement in Soviet relations with the region has occurred in regard to Israel, the USSR's position within the Arab world has not diminished. Gorbachev's rational approach has enabled the USSR to find the golden mean and enhance the Soviet status in the Arab world. It is still able to influence the Arab radical front, but it is totally accepted by the moderate front.

Gorbachev has sought to achieve practical goals in a pragmatic way. He has attempted at once to solve Soviet economic problems improve the Soviet position in the region, and to improve Soviet relations with the United States. Gorbachev's new outlook in the Middle East, in short, fits

into a larger pattern. It is not exceptional behavior but derivative of his global outlook.

Scrutinizing Gorbachev's moves toward the region leads to the conclusion that he has achieved great benefits and improvements from the Soviet point of view just by changing general strategy and some elements of tactics with respect to the region. But a deeper assessment suggests that he has altered the use of tangible means like the economic aid, as well. For the first time with regard to Syria, Gorbachev accomplished his goals by reducing aid.

To sum up, Gorbachev has put the Soviet Union in a waiting posture, sitting on the fence after gaining political revenues. Contemporary Soviet policy is flexible enough to counter any development in the region. This, in my opinion is Gorbachev's greatest contribution.

The major constraints to Gorbachev's new outlook are both internal and external in nature. They include: 1) the shocking state of the economy, which is often of concern to Soviet citizens, 2) the disintegration of the Soviet state itself, 3) Israel's declaration about settling emigrants in the occupied territories, which could induce Moscow to put new obstacles in the path of Jewish emigrants, and 4) a delay in solving the Palestinian problem. I believe that the first two considerations are foremost in importance in the short run. A failure to solve these problems could cause Gorbachev's downfall and the appointment of a more conservative leader. As to the third, we have already seen

a decline in Soviet will to fulfill an agreement for Aeroflot, the Soviet airline, to fly Jewish emigrants directly to Israel. But Gorbachev's attitude on this this matter will be affected by the US attitude on Jewish emigration. He will probably not want to sacrifice his primary goal of enhancing relations with the U.S. over this issue.

Because of Gorbachev's policy, a new balance of power has been created in the Middle East. The reduction of Syria's importance and the end of the Iran-Iraq war has shifted the emphasis toward Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, and the renewal of diplomatic ties between Egypt and Syria has apparently established a wider moderate Arabic front in the region. Furthermore, Iraq was aided by Saudi Arabia during her war with Iran, and current military cooperation between Iraq and Jordan creates an implicit front that encompasses all Arab countries in the region.

Yet this front lacks a cohesive goal. This situation is due to 1) "historical competition for power in the region between Egypt and Iraq that goes back to biblical times" (81:4); 2) Iraq's military strength which destabilizes the region, and her ties with Jordan can bind the latter to a more radical posture; 3) Assad's resentment of Yasser Arafat as the PLO's leader and conflicts in their views of the right way to settle the Palestinian problem; 4) mutual rivalry between Syria and Iraq over the Ba'athist ideology and Syria's support of Iran in the Iraq-Iran War.

Albeit it seems that really good relations between Iraq and Syria are merely a dream, it would not surprise me if their relations improve in the future. This cooperation will evolve from 1) mutual resentments on the part of Iraq and Syria over Israel's attack on the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981 and Israel's annexation of the Syrian territories held since 1967; 2) explicit dissatisfaction with the way the Palestinian problem would be solved; and 3) the compatibility of Iraq's desire for hegemony over the Middle East (possibly through a future strong nuclear capability) and Syria's desire to eliminate Israel. Iraq and Syria, thus, could enter into military cooperation as an offensive radical opposition front against Israel, thereby destabilizing the whole region.

The question is what would Gorbachev's attitude be under such circumstances. As of now, it seems, because his interest is mainly in cultivating U.S. relations, that he will do all he can to lessen the problem.

In my opinion, the pattern that Gorbachev has set will not be changed radically even if he is replaced. The advantages that the Soviets have gained in the region are too great to risk losing them by a precipitous reversal of approach. Although a conservative successor might modify policy, I believe that he will adhere to the basic strategy that Gorbachev has implemented in the area.

The main trend that I foresee is continuation of the moderate, pragmatic approach set by Gorbachev, so long as

the Palestinian problem remains to be solved. If the problem is not solved in a reasonable timeframe, the Soviets might seek further understanding with the United States in order to force the parties to the conflict to compromise. The degree of cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union, to be sure, would depend on US acquiescence, I feel that Gorbachev's political maneuvers are restricting the United States' freedom of maneuver. The Soviets will become an equal partner in the peace process, something they have sought to achieve since they were excluded in the early 1970s.

In conclusion, the Middle East to date is another region in which Gorbachev has implemented his policy perfectly and in doing so has achieved Soviet national ends.

The framework of change in the region is set. Whether the region displays rationality or continues to be governed by religious notions and traditional non-recognition policy in the future now depends on how enlightened the countries involved in the dispute are in defining their self-interests and whether they have the will to solve the dispute.

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